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Food Stamp Press Conference
May 26, 2005
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DTA Commissioner John Wagner

Good afternoon and thanks for coming.

My name is John Wagner and I'm the commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance, the agency that administers the Food Stamp Program.

I am very pleased to be here with you—our partners from the federal level, the state level and the community level—to officially launch our new Food Stamp ad campaign entitled “Good Food; Good Health.” You see that this campaign is ambitious and features posters like these in over 400 subway cars and stations throughout the Orange, Red, Blue and Green lines.

As you well know, hunger is a silent and often hidden problem in our communities. It can be tucked away in the quiet room of an elderly person, it can be cloaked in the busy work day of someone keeping two or more jobs to make ends meet, and it can make itself known in a classroom when a young student finds it hard to concentrate or answer a question.

There are potentially hundreds of thousands of Massachusetts residents who may not even be aware they qualify for the program. Not only do food stamps provide an important health and nutritional value, they also help individuals and families stretch limited resources.

Just over 2 years ago we held a similar press conference announcing the Department's efforts to streamline the Food Stamp application process, in an attempt to make it easier to apply for and receive this important benefit. In collaboration with the Department, Project Bread pioneered an electronic, internet-based version of the application that has been a tremendous success. And we shortened our application. By working with our partners like Pat Baker and other members of the Food Stamp Improvement Coalition, Project Bread, food banks, and many others, we are now serving over 100,000 more individuals than we were serving just over 2 years ago.

But we have much more to do. The latest federal numbers show Massachusetts is reaching only about half of the people eligible for this important program. That is why I am please to expand our outreach via two initiatives we are announcing today.

First, the Bay State Combined Application Project (known as “Bay State CAP”) is a team effort by DTA, the Social Security Administration, and the US Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service. Massachusetts is one of only six states in the nation to be allowed to implement this. Bay State CAP will make it easier for individuals who are elderly and disabled to apply for food stamp benefits.

Here's how it will work: when an eligible person walks into their local Social Security Office to apply for Supplemental Security Income or SSI, they will be asked three simple questions to determine eligibility for food stamps. Once approved for SSI, this information is sent electronically to DTA when we can then determine eligibility for Food Stamps. Three simple questions. No additional trip to the welfare office.

So far we converted over 15,000 cases to Bay State CAP, increasing the value of food stamps issued by us by over \$360,000 every month. We think there are potentially 68,000 additional cases which would likely be eligible for food stamps under the Bay State CAP but currently are not receiving food stamps.

The second new initiative is our joint media campaign as you see here today, provided with support from our federal partner: the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service. As I said, these posters will be hanging in subway stations and trains through the month of July. In addition, we've launched a new toll-free number at the Department (1-866-950-FOOD) and are broadcasting this via a radio campaign on five stations (WBZ, WJMN, WMJX, WODS, WXKS). By calling this number, anyone can receive information about the Food Stamp Program and have an application sent to their home.

Finally, I want to recognize the Department's Food Stamp Director, Phuoc Cao, his staff in central office, and the front-line workers who have taken on this challenge and have implemented many reforms that give us reason to celebrate today.

But as we look forward to implementing the new initiatives we've announced today, I urge all of us to continue our efforts to enhance awareness of this important nutritional benefit—Food Stamps—for Good Food, for Good Health.

Now I have the honor of introducing some of the important partners I mentioned in our efforts to enhance awareness of the Food Stamp Program.

First of all, I personally want to recognize **Fran Zorn**'s commitment to this program and efforts in Massachusetts. Fran is the USDA's FNS administrator for the Northeast Region and has been a true partner in our efforts to improve the Food Stamp Program for the people of Massachusetts. Fran....

Next, I want to mention Manny Nunez is here from the regional office of the Social Security Administration. The regional SSA has been a tremendous supporter of the Bay State CAP program. Without their leadership and assistance, this program would never have been available to the residents of the Commonwealth.

Last, but in no way least, I'd like to ask **Ellen Parker** to say a few words. Ellen is the Executive Director of Project Bread and a national leader in efforts to prevent and combat hunger. Whether it's through Food Stamps or other nutritional supports, Ellen is always supportive in finding effective, innovative solutions to hunger. Ellen...



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MEDIA CAMPAIGNS SEEK TO EXPAND FOOD STAMP USE

State and federal officials today unveiled a collaborative outreach program aimed at getting more people who are eligible for food stamps enrolled in the program.

“There are hundreds of thousands of Massachusetts residents who are probably not even aware they qualify for the program,” said Department of Transitional Assistance Commissioner John Wagner. “Not only do food stamps provide an important health and nutritional value, but they also help individuals and families enhance their financial resources.”

Speaking at the New England Medical Center MBTA station, Wagner said the “Good Food Good Health” posters are now on display in Orange, Red, Blue and Green Line stations and in more than 400 subway cars.

“The Food Stamp Program is the nation’s first line of defense against hunger, a powerful tool to improve the nutrition and health of millions of low-income people,” said Frances Zorn, regional administrator, USDA Food and Nutrition Service. “For more than 30 years, it has helped low-income people purchase nutritious food. These benefits are particularly helpful for America’s working poor, helping them to maintain their financial independence.”

The posters come on the heels of a two-month radio campaign that will be repeated in August as well as a combined effort among DTA, USDA and the Social Security Administration known as the Bay State Combined Application (CAP) project.

Information from federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) applicants is now sent electronically to DTA where food stamp eligibility is automatically determined rather than requiring the applicant to file a separate food stamp application. Aimed at individuals such as the elderly, disabled or blind who have little or no income, the program has enrolled more than 15,000 clients since February. DTA hopes to provide food stamp benefits for another 68,000 within several months.

“The Social Security Administration is pleased to have been part of this innovative federal-state partnership which has brought important benefits to so many people in the Commonwealth,” said Manuel J. Vaz, SSA’s regional commissioner for New England. “We in SSA look forward to our continued participation in the project in the weeks and months ahead.”

“Every week, hundreds of low-income elderly people call our hotline in need of food,” said Project Bread Executive Director Ellen Parker. “Now they can get food stamps conveniently without ever having to go to a food stamp office to apply. This is a great step forward in maintaining the health of the low-income elderly and disabled in our state.”

More than \$350 million in food stamps benefits are distributed to nearly 360,000 Massachusetts residents in a year, but that represents about only half of all who are eligible for them. In a little more than two years, DTA’s outreach efforts have enabled the Department to increase food stamp enrollment by over 100,000 individuals.

“We urge individuals and families who are struggling to call us on our toll-free food stamp hotline to see if they are eligible,” said Wagner.

The telephone number is 1-866-950-FOOD. Information is also available at www.mass.gov/dta.

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Good Food Good Health

Food Stamps There When You Need Them

Call the Food Stamp Program (toll free) at

1-866-950-FOOD

or visit our web site at www.mass.gov/dta

to find out if you qualify and how to apply

A message from USDA and the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA)
USDA and DTA are equal opportunity providers and employers



Tener Buenos Alimentos Es Tener Buena Salud

Los Cupones para Alimentos Estan Ahi Cuando Usted Los Necesite

Llame gratis al Programa de Cupones para Alimentos al

1-866-950-3663

o visite www.mass.gov/dta en la Internet

para averiguar si usted califica y saber como
usted puede aplicar.

Un mensaje de USDA y Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA)
USDA y DTA son proveedores y empleadores que ofrecen oportunidad igual para todos.